

Nothing Different by 65writings

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Summary:

To lose the person you love to your own neglect has now re-ranked itself as Steve Harrington's number one fear—above monster ambushes, being a shitty babysitter, and even losing his status as the best point-guard on the varsity basketball team—after having nearly experienced exactly that. Luckily, the one he loves is there to love him back and love him through coping with the traumatic experience.

Nothing Different

"No, I don't need your help."

Steve shrunk into himself a bit—his shoulder raising, his eyes dropping to the floor, his hands finding one another to twist the end of his pointer finger—and he took a step back from the counter. He's been particularly sensitive recently, ever since the incident, and he's acutely aware of it.

"I'm—I didn't mean it like that, love. You know that," Billy added after glancing over his shoulder to see Steve's shyness.

Steve does know... but he can't help it.

Gently, Billy took Steve's left hand into his right and guided him to regain their previous closeness. He touching their foreheads together, so that all that Steve can see is the blue of Billy's deep eyes, the curl of his thick lashes, the faint California freckles dusting his skin. Steve's breathing slows; he hadn't even realized he'd been panting slightly. Billy's hand finds a home at the back of Steve's neck, where his thumb and pointer finger card though his hair.

"Steve?"

"Mhm?"

"Can I ask you something?"

"Yes."

"Looking at me, right now, do you see anything different than a week ago?"

Steve considers this, but only for a moment, and shakes his head no. He's still the same, down to the crescent of yellow-green at the edge of his iris in one eye. It's still Billy, even in the way he feels—the pressure of his one hand at the top of his spine.

"Exactly. Nothing's changed. Look at me—" Steve met his gaze, matching the firmness of it. "—I love you, you son of a bitch. I love you and everything. All of it. The whole shebang. But you've gotta quit carrying this around with you. No more blaming yourself, okay? For me? So you don't break my poor heart?"

Billy was running out of things to say, Steve was sure of it. But he understood. What else was there to say except 'I love you,' and 'it's not your fault'?

Steve nodded anyways, promising something he couldn't keep. Billy lingered for a minute, but eventually he went back to doing the dishes—one handed.

And Steve's heart, heavy as lad and sick with grief, sunk even lower in his ribs. As his memory clouded his vision, he could feel his whole body strain with his heart's descent—his blood running thicker, his veins tightening and straining from his fingertips into his shoulders, his stomach dropping into his feet; everything so short of abandoning him completely and leaving him for dead.

Just like... just like...

Steve forgot having left Billy in the car. Which sounds impossible—how could you forget, in a moment of danger, everything most important to you? But in a rush of adrenaline, everything but the immediate had slipped his mind.

Steve was completing his evening job as the boy's chauffeur; with Dustin and Lucas and an over-stuffed duffle bag crammed in the backseat, and an impatient but playful Billy curled up in shotgun. Billy'd had his visor flipped down and his mirror slid open so he could see into the back where the boys engaged with him in light-hearted banter.

"You can take this however you like," Billy teased, "but Henderson, you're definitely C3PO."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Dustin questioned. "Wh-What does that even imply?"

Lucas shrugged, and then clapped his hand on Dustin's shoulder, "He's kinda got a point, man."

"What!"

When they'd arrived at Dustin's house, it was dark. And Steve just had... a feeling.

A feeling.

So he walked Dustin and Lucas the fifty meters from the car, up the lawn, and to the front door.

And then it wan't just a feeling.

They made it halfway up the yard when Steve'd heard it—the guttural purr of a demodog from somewhere behind them. He whirled around and recalls the surge, the breathlessness, of finding himself face-to-face with a flowered-mouth with rows and rows of yellowed-teeth. And that's where his memory goes blank from the adrenaline high. The next thing he recalls is the three of them standing, alive, in Mrs. Henderson's kitchen, nursing themselves with granola bars and glasses of grape juice. Steve sat on the counter, running his ankle under the faucet where he'd been scratch over his ankle bone. It burned, but the water was warm and wicked away the

fresh blood as it oozed. He felt so strange that he didn't really even mind the tap soaking the cuff of his jeans or the lining of his sneakers. He absently picked at a grayed seam at the bottom of his t-shirt and chewed and chewed on the same bite of granola bar when he remembered.

Billy.

It was as if Steve hadn't just been attacked in the front yard twenty minutes prior. He flew out of the house the fastest he'd ran all night and didn't stop until he slammed full-bodied into the side of his car, hands flat against the window pane, the glass squeaking in warning against his force.

The passenger seat was empty.

Steve had never felt anything like it—the feeling that Billy was gone. It was like dying in all of the worst ways, all at once. It was drowning, the pressure on his chest building as he floated down deeper and deeper; it was being lit with fire, starting from the bottom and slowly spreading elsewhere, burning slowly; it was taking so many sleeping pills that he died of shock, rather than sleep.

Billy was gone.

Steve didn't know what to do. He couldn't do anything except stare at the empty seat. He was paralyzed, petrified, disabled.

"Steve..."

His heart thudded once, threatening to burst with blood and terror, at the sound of his own name.

It came again, this time almost silenced by the voices of Dustin and Lucas shouting the same word from the safety of the front porch.

"Steve..."

It sounded like... it sounded like Nancy'd sounded the night at the Byers' when he'd tried to—half-assed—apologize for being a shitty boyfriend. Except, this time, the response was infinitely more broken. He knew it was Billy.

"Wh-Where are you?" he stumbled; his teeth clattered with shock.

"Here," came the reply, his voice strained. That was all.

Steve sunk to his knees, and, as he bent his face down to the ground, his cheek to the concrete, he found him—Billy Hargrove wedged under Steve's car.

He was bloodied, jacket and face and pavement all stained brown-red and glistening, and cradling a crooked arm. He was breathing so heavily, obviously in pain, and pressing his tongue against his bottom lip.

"They couldn't reach me under here," he said softly. "I'd already gotten out, and-and, I thought they'd break the window, but... but they couldn't. They couldn't—"

Billy was looking past Steve then. And into empty space.

The drive to Hawkins Lab was all Ms. Henderson trying to wince as Steve hysterically sobbed with a loopy Billy cradled in his lap. He was curled over him, repeating the motion of bushing back a curl from Billy's ear, stopping only to wipe drops of tears rolling down his cheeks. Billy smiled faintly up at him, but said nothing. And the overnight stay in the lab was all doctors murmuring in and out of the room something stopping to feed Steve a piece of information.

Billy, as pieced together by the doctors, had probably gotten out of the car after seeing the dogs emerge from the back of the house, and stood and watched—dumbfounded—as Steve had fought past them to escort the kids inside. And, when the dogs had missed the three of them as a dinner, they'd set themselves on Billy, who was still standing by the vehicle. Knowing he was too far from the door to make a run for it, and not knowing what he was up against, he'd made up his mind to fight them off.

Upon the force of a body-to-body collision with one monster, Billy's arm had been snapped in half, most likely when trying to break his fall. Then, as the demodog landed next to Billy, it'd dug its claws into that same hand, puncturing the skin and nicking arteries in three places. He also had a gash across his chest, also probably from the creature's landing. It was then, the doctors concluded, that Billy'd rolled under the car to protect himself—sustaining only his broken arm, a minor concussion, some nerve-damage, and blood loss.

Considering the circumstances, they said, it could be so much worse. One nurse—a small Asian woman with high cheeks and gentle eyes—told him calmly that Steve should be proud of himself; had he not found Billy right then, he might've bled out; the dogs might have returned, this time with friends; he might've gone into shock and suffered more severe brain injuries. There were so many worse things it could have been.

But Steve did not feel proud.

Dustin explained the upside down to Billy soon after he'd woken up completely and begun asking questions. Dustin had to dumb the explanation down numerous times before Billy could even begin to wrap his brain around it all. The whole conversation, Billy was holding Steve's hand is his one good one, and Steve held his breath,

trying not to cry. But Billy accepted the truth with poise, and few words.

Both Billy and Steve shared few words over the next couple of days, yet never leaving one another's sides. But, when Steve woke up from his flashback in a heap tangled with Billy, bodies flush to the cold kitchen tiles and the sink still gushing steaming water, Steve broke the silence. And they talked until the could heal their wounded hearts and kiss better what no longer had to hurt.

Author's Note:

I haven't written a piece of fanfiction in a LONG time—it's just been a lot of me coming up with little drabbles, but never following through with them. So for me to have actually ran with this little blip (even for just 1500+ words) is a big accomplishment for me.

Hopefully the story—regardless of how short—was/is enjoyable!

ALL feedback is welcome (even criticism).